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EDWARD G. POPLAWSKI, ESQ.
SIDLEY AUSTIN
BROWN & WOOD LLP
555 WEST FIFTH STREET
LOS ANGELES CA 90013-1010

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OFFICE OF PETITIONS

In re Application of:
Readhead, et al.
Filed: 15 April, 1999
Application No. 09/292,723
Docket No.: PO7 41795 (18810-80334)

ON PETITION

This is a decision on the petition filed herein on 31 December, 2002, under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a)¹ to revive the above-identified application.

For the reasons set forth below, the petition under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) is **DISMISSED**.

NOTES:

- (1) Any petition (and fee) for reconsideration of this decision under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) (as to unavoidable delay) or an alternative request for relief under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b)² (as to unintentional delay) must be submitted within two (2)

¹ A Petition filed under the provisions of 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) must be accompanied by:

- (1) The required reply, unless previously filed. In a nonprovisional application abandoned for failure to prosecute, the required reply may be met by the filing of a continuing application. In an application for patent, abandoned or lapsed for failure to pay the issue fee or any portion thereof, the required reply must be the payment of the issue fee or any outstanding balance thereof;
- (2) the petition fee required by 37 C.F.R. §1.17(l);
- (3) A showing to the satisfaction of the Commissioner that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the reply due date until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to the is paragraph was unavoidable; and
- (4) Any terminal disclaimer (and fee set forth in 37 C.F.R. §1.20(d)) required pursuant to 37 C.F.R. §1.137(c).

An application is "unavoidably" abandoned only where Petitioner (or Petitioner's counsel) takes all action necessary for a proper response to the outstanding Office action, but through the intervention of unforeseen circumstances, the response is not timely received in the Office. That is, in the context of ordinary human affairs the test is such care as is generally used and observed by prudent and careful persons in relation to their most important business. Ex parte Pratt, 1887 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 31 (Comm'r Pat. 1887); Ex parte Henrich, 1913 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 139, 141 (Comm'r. Pat. 1913).

² Effective December 1, 1997, the provisions of 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b) now provide that where the delay in reply was unintentional, a petition may be filed to revive an abandoned application or a lapsed patent pursuant to 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b). a grantable petition filed under the provisions of 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b) must be accompanied by:

- (1) the required reply, unless previously filed. In a nonprovisional application abandoned for failure to prosecute, the required reply may be met by the filing of a continuing application. In an application or patent, abandoned or lapsed for failure to pay the issue fee or any portion thereof, the required reply must be the payment of the issue fee or any outstanding balance thereof.

months from the mail date of this decision. Extensions of time under 37 C.F.R. §1.136(a) are permitted. The reconsideration request should include a cover letter entitled "Renewed Petition under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a)"; and/or "Petition under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b)";

- (2) Thereafter, there will be no further reconsideration of this matter.

BACKGROUND

The record indicates that:

- Applicant failed to reply timely and properly to the final Office action mailed on 3 January, 2002, with reply due (absent extension of time) on or before 3 April, 2002;
- the application went abandoned after midnight 3 April, 2002;
- Notice of Abandonment was not mailed before the instant petition was filed;
- in his showing, Petitioner inter alia indicates that he did not receive the 3 January, 2002, Office action, however, Petitioner apparently received a copy of the paper in November 2002 and submitted contemporaneously with the instant petition what he has styled as a "Response to Final Office Action";
- the Examiner has reviewed the reply of 31 December, 2002, and determined that, while the terminal disclaimer does obviate the double-patenting issue (over 09/272,443), the reply does not place the application in condition for allowance.³

STATUTES, REGULATIONS AND ANALYSIS

Congress has authorized the Commissioner to "revive an application if the delay is shown to the satisfaction of the Commissioner to have been "unavoidable." 35 U.S.C. §133 (1994).⁴

(2) the petition fee as set forth in 37 C.F.R. §1.17(m);

(3) a statement that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b) was unintentional. The Commissioner may require additional information where there is a question whether the delay was unintentional; and

(4) any terminal disclaimer (and fee set forth in 37 C.F.R. §1.20(d)) required pursuant to 37 C.F.R. §1.137(c). (Emphasis supplied.)

³ The proper response (see: Fn. 1, item (1); MPEP 711.03(c)) to the final Office action must be in the form of: (a) an amendment *prima facie* placing the application in condition for allowance; (b) a Notice of Appeal; or © a continuation application or request for continued examination.

⁴ 35 U.S.C. §133 provides:

35 U.S.C. §133 Time for prosecuting application.

Upon failure of the applicant to prosecute the application within six months after any action therein, of which notice has been given or mailed to the applicant, or within such shorter time, not less than thirty days, as fixed by the Commissioner in such action, the application shall be regarded as abandoned by the parties thereto, unless it be shown to the satisfaction of the Commissioner that such delay was unavoidable.

The regulations at 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) and (b) set forth the requirements for a petitioner to revive a previously unavoidably or unintentionally, respectively, abandoned application under this congressional grant of authority.

The language of 35 U.S.C. §133 and 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) is clear, unambiguous, and without qualification: the delay in tendering the reply to the outstanding Office action, as well as filing the first petition seeking revival, must have been unavoidable for the reply now to be accepted on petition.⁵

Delays in responding properly raise the question whether delays are unavoidable.⁶ Where there is a question whether the delay was unavoidable, Petitioners must meet the burden of establishing that the delay was unavoidable within the meaning of 35 U.S.C. §133 and 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a).⁷

And the Petitioner must be diligent in attending to the matter.⁸ Failure to do so does not constitute the care required under Pratt, and so cannot satisfy the test for diligence and due care.

(By contrast, unintentional delays are those that do not satisfy the very strict statutory and regulatory requirements of unavoidable delay, and also, by definition, are not intentional.⁹))

Allegations as to Unavoidable Delay

In determining if a delay was unavoidable, decisions on reviving abandoned applications have adopted the standard of the reasonably prudent person acting in their most important business matters.¹⁰ In addition, decisions on revival are made on a "case-by-case basis, taking all the facts and circumstances into account."¹¹

Petitioner indicates that the delay was a result of non-receipt of the final Office action. While that

⁵ Therefore, by example, an unavoidable delay in the payment of the Filing Fee might occur if a reply is shipped by the US Postal Service, but due to catastrophic accident, the delivery is not made.

⁶ See: Changes to Patent Practice and Procedure; Final Rule Notice, 62 Fed. Reg. at 53158-59 (October 10, 1997), 1203 Off. Gaz. Pat. Office at 86-87 (October 21, 1997).

⁷ See: In re Application of G, 11 USPQ2d 1378, 1380 (Comm'r Pats. 1989).

⁸ See: Diligence in Filing Petitions to Revive and Petitions to Withdraw the Holding of Abandonment, 1124 Off. Gaz. Pat. Office 33 (March 19, 1991). It was and is Petitioner's burden to exercise diligence in seeking either to have the holding of abandonment withdrawn or the application revived. See 1124 Off. Gaz. Pat. Office supra.

⁹ Therefore, by example, an unintentional delay in the reply might occur if the reply and transmittal form are to be prepared for shipment by the US Postal Service, but other pressing matters distract one's attention and the mail is not timely deposited for shipment.

¹⁰ Ex parte Pratt, 1887 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 31, 32-33 (Comm'r Pat. 1887) (the term "unavoidable" "is applicable to ordinary human affairs, and requires no more or greater care or diligence than is generally used and observed by prudent and careful men in relation to their most important business"); In re Mattullath, 38 App. D.C. 497, 514-15 (D.C. Cir. 1912); Ex parte Henrich, 1913 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 139, 141 (Comm'r Pat. 1913).

¹¹ Smith v. Mossinghoff, 671 F.2d 533, 538, 213 USPQ 977, 982 (D.C. Cir. 1982).

may yet to be found as supported,¹² Petitioner clearly has since received the final Office action in question but as of this writing Petitioner has failed to file a proper response. (See: Fn. 3.)

As to the petition alleging to unavoidable delay, that determination will be held in abeyance until Petitioner files the proper reply in the form of: (a) an amendment *prima facie* placing the application in condition for allowance; (b) a Notice of Appeal; or © a continuation application or request for continued examination.

Accordingly, in view of the failure of the “reply” requirement to be met herein, the petition to revive as to unavoidable delay under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) must be and hereby is **dismissed**.¹³

Further correspondence with respect to this matter should be addressed as follows:

By mail: (Effective 1 May, 2003)¹⁴
Commissioner for Patents
P.O. Box 1450
Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

By FAX: (703) 308-6916
ATTN.: Office of Petitions

By hand: Crystal Plaza Four, Suite CP4-3C23
2201 South Clark Place
Arlington, VA 22202

Telephone inquiries concerning this decision may be directed to the undersigned at (703) 305-9199.



John J. Gillon, Jr.
Senior Attorney
Office of Petitions

¹² See MPEP 711.03(c)(III)(C)(2).

¹³ ALTERNATIVE VENUE: Should a petitioner be unable to satisfy a “showing” requirement as to unavoidable delay, Petitioner’s only alternative to irretrievable abandonment is to file a petition and fee as set forth at NOTE 1, above at pages 1 and 2, under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b), and state therein that “the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b) was unintentional.”

¹⁴ To determine the appropriate addresses for other subject-specific correspondence, refer to the USPTO Web site at www.uspto.gov.